New York
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1952

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1952 PRODUCTIONS

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Desire Under the Elms"

Journal American

January 17, 1952

A Powerful Drama; HighlyRecommended

By JOHN McCLAIN

The American National Theatre And Academy (familiarly known as ANTA) last night opened their 1952 season at the ANTA Playhouse with an auspicious revival of Eugene O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms."

The harsh and powerful drama was presented with precision and imagination; the acting was uniformly meritorious, and there seems little doubt that it should pay off with an extended run on Broadway.

In most of O'Neill's better plays he was preoccupied with the influence of God over man. In this one, which ranks high on his list, he is concerned with a cruel God who exacts a terrible penance from the hardy folk of New England whose destiny he shapes in the year 1850.

There is Ephraim Cabot, an extremely durable old gent of 76, who has sweated his way through more than half a century digging rocks out of the countryside and making stone fences and succeeding finally in developing a productive farm.

• • •

Drives 2 to Death

To achieve this he has driven two wives to their graves and begat three sons. At the point where we meet him two of the sons have taken off for California to seek an easy dollar in the gold fields and the remaining one, the product of his last wife, has remained behind in the hope that he will inherit the property.

But the old man crosses him up by going out and acquiring a third wife, a buxom young lady less than half his age. The major part of the drama is concerned with her highly incendiary assault upon the son, his eventual acquiescence, and the monstrous tragedy that results when this union produces an apparent heir for the old man.

The logic of all this is hard to follow at times. The old man's strict and spartan adherence to his ruthless God causes him untold anguish, provokes two deaths and a murder within his farmhouse, yet at the final curtain we find him returning philosophically to his chores.

Like the "Ole Debbil Sea" in O'Neill's earlier "Anna Christie" these imponderable forces which control the lives of men operate with little regard for common justice. We should all be thankful we don't live in New Engand.

• • •

Capable Cast

The uniformly capable cast which has been assembled by Robert Whitehead, the producer, consists mostly of Karl Malden, as old man Cabot; Carol Stone, as his voluptuous third wife, and Douglas Watson, as the son who becomes involved with her.

These three carry the burden of the highly emotional action and under the able direction of Harold Clurman they offer superb performances. All this is enhanced by the support of Lou Polan and George Mitchell, as the other two boys.

Mordecai Gorelik ran up a cross-section farmhouse which was adaptable to the complicated machinations that took place within the 12 scenes.

You've got to hand it to old O'Neill. He's got incredible power and inventiveness and a great and timeless gift of dialogue. This play may be 27 years old, but it's a standout in this season of 1952. It is highly recommended.

"DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS"

Play by Eugene O'Neill; staged by Harold Clurman; scenery by Mordecai Gorelik; costumes by Ben Edwards; revived by the American National Theatre and Academy (Robert Whitehead, managing director) at the ANTA Playhouse, January 16, 1952. The cast:

Eben Cabot.....Douglas Watson
Simeon Cabot.....Lou Polan
Peter Cabot....George Mitchell
Ephraim Cabot....Karl Malden
Abbie Putnam.....Carol Stone
Young Girl.....Jocelyn Brando
Man.....Charles Aidman
Fiddler.....Mark Gordon
Another Man.....John McLiam
Old Farmer..Howard H. Fischer
Woman.....Minette Barrett
Sheriff.....Russell Gaige

New York Post

January 17, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Tragic Power of Eugene O'Neill

There is a primitive crudeness about Eugene O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms," and a kind of overwrought intensity that can come perilously close to being embarrassing, but, after nearly thirty years, the famous drama possesses an almost overwhelming quality of elemental power. It is not, heaven knows, either glib or slick, and I suppose it is possible for the sophisticated to laugh at its faults, but I do not see how anyone can deny its tremendous tragic force. It remains one of the monumental plays of the American theater, and a lasting tribute to the genius of our foremost dramatist.

It was wise of Robert Whitehead, the new managing director of the American National Theater and Academy, to begin the organization's second season at the ANTA Playhouse with a production of this celebrated tragedy, and last night's performance seemed to me an excellent one. Sympathetically and understandingly directed by Harold Clurman, with a fine setting by Mordecai Gorelik and a particularly good performance by Karl Malden as the grim New England patriarch, Ephraim Cabot, this vigorous revival brings out strikingly all the qualities of a notable contribution to modern dramatic writing.

Raw Emotions

I have no doubt that "Desire Under the Elms" would be easy game for a savage parodist. There is no restraint or decorousness about its raw emotions, and, when it goes into its scenes of dramatic intensity, it is not afraid to push them to the utmost. There is a sort of almost naive serious-mindedness in it that is upon occasion disturbing, and there is a repetitiousness in the phrasing that can grow slightly uncomfortable. But there is a strange integrity in it, too, and a feeling for authentic tragedy that no other writer for the American theater has been able to capture.

It is a far more difficult play than "Anna Christie," and I think it is an infinitely finer one. The story of old Ephraim Cabot, who was a hard man because he felt that God was hard, and who loved and lusted like an old Testament prophet, is black and ugly and forbidding, but it has pity and terror, and an odd quality of grim beauty. Its people are simple and primitive, and they covet and hate and commit murder, but Mr. O'Neill looks upon them with a brooding sadness that gives both them and their emotions a tragic dignity even in their most sordid and cruel moments.

Mr. Malden has been recognized for some time as one of the ablest of our current actors, but somehow the qualities he has revealed in his other roles had not made me expect him to cope with the rugged difficulties of his part in the O'Neill tragedy. Revealing a dramatic stature and a direct personal force that I, for one, had not seen in him before, he plays so impressively that even those of us who can remember the late Walter Huston in the characterization must be impressed. It is obvious that we have in Mr. Malden an actor of authentic size.

Carol Stone, as the young wife who kills her baby, and Douglas Watson, as the son who hates his father, are somewhat less satisfying, but they do not let down Mr. O'Neill. Miss Stone, for example, lacks the strength that her role calls for, but once she gets into her important later scenes, she manages to be surprisingly moving. Mr. Watson struck me as just a little mannered at times, but he, also, handles his important moments admirably. Lou Polan and George Mitchell, as the other two sons of old Cabot, are excellent in their lesser roles. "Desire Under the Elms" remains one of the distinguished works of the modern stage.

The New York Times

January 17, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

When the final accounts are tallied, "Desire Under the Elms," may turn out to be the greatest play written by an American. To a theatregoer who has just come from the Anta Playhouse, Mr. O'Neill's harsh tragedy of New England is not something to feel temperate about. For it has the headlong strength of a major creation. It has more size than the life it literally portrays, and it has also the shattering impact of a thunderbolt.

Let's be grateful for the stirring performance that opened at the Anta Playhouse last evening as the first of this season's series. Mordecai Gorelik has provided an austere setting with grimly poetic overtones. Harold Clurman, who has stature enough as a director to revere stature in a dramatist, has organized a tight and tumultuous performance that is not afraid of bold scenes.

* * *

People who remember the original performance in 1924 may quibble about this one a little. It is not hard enough all the way through. Karl Malden's old man Cabot is too loose-jointed for so heroic a patriarch, and Douglas Watson's Eben is too genteel. But those comments are perhaps supercilious in view of the fact that the performance as a whole plucks out the soul of Mr. O'Neill's mystic tragedy.

And there is no doubt at all that Carol Stone's Abbie is a stunning piece of work. You may not have visualized her in advance as a rapacious and passionate woman on a New England farm. But she has the strength and the insight to play it superbly. It is Miss Stone who first drives the iron into the performance and makes "Desire Under the Elms" come wholly to life as an ode to greed and lust and murder without remorse. Once she enters those New England catacombs, Mr. O'Neill's play becomes overwhelming. She and Mr. Watson play their scenes together with recklessness and fire, and also with theatre.

* * *

For Mr. O'Neill is basically a theatre writer. This story of rapacious people whose love and hate are practically identical could not be told in any other form of literature. Even the dialogue, which seems to be lacking in literary grace, has rude power in the theatre. It looks clumsy in print. But in the theatre it goes bluntly to the heart of the wild things Mr. O'Neill is writing about.

Mr. O'Neill forces his story so ferociously that it is on the verge of melodrama all the way through. The ownership paper, the money bag concealed in the floor, the weird courtship in the parlor sealed off for funerals, the orgiastic party celebrating the birth of the baby, the murder of the baby, and the arrival of the sheriff's party—these things intrinsically are close to hokum.

* * *

But Mr. O'Neill has subordinated them to his great theme of the fury of nature. He has written them with so much conviction that they are symbols of doom in a terrific tragedy of men in the grip of forces they cannot master. The materials of "Desire Under the Elms" are primitive. But the whole play has the grand design of a masterpiece.

Thanks for a magnificent evening in the theatre.

Daily Mirror

January 17, 1952

ANTA Puts on O'Neil's 'Desire Under the Elms'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

There are those who contend that "Desire Under the Elms" is Eugene O'Neill's best play. They have every right to their opinion. But we cannot share it. It makes a great to-do over people who are not worth it. The Cabots are about as mean, lustful and blasphemous a lot as you are ever likely to find in a single script.

Their actions are motivated by instinct rather than mind. They really haven't much to think with. They are creatures of greedy, sordid emotions. There isn't a one in the bunch for whom we can feel the slightest sympathy. When we originally caught the drab drama back in 1924, we wondered why it enjoyed such wide popularity.

Perhaps there were several reasons. Some playgoers must have attended to watch the hard, cantankerous Cabots destroy one another. For them it was like watching a cock fight or a battle between a cobra and a mongoose. An executive connected with the management of the play at that time explained: "They come to hear the cussin'."

In our book, "Desire Under the Elms" is a more literate version of "Tobacco Road." Simeon and Peter Cabot are cut from the same bolt as the animalistic Lesters. Eban Cabot is a shade superior, but not much. Ephraim Cabot is more resourceful, but just as mean. As for Abbie Putnam, she found her level when she married Ephraim, not for love but for a house.

But like it or not, ANTA, under the management of Robert Whitehead, has given it a most effective production at the ANTA Playhouse. It is particularly stunning from the pictorial viewpoint, due to Mordecai Gorelik's setting and lighting, Ben Edwards' costumes and Harold Clurman's direction.

Clurman has chosen to give it mannered, stylized staging. This method, we think, appeals more to the eye than the ear. Its artifice is evident and sometimes annoyingly obtrusive. The pace is notably slow and overly deliberate in the first act. You can fairly hear the metronome beat, and imagine the movement of Maestro Clurman's baton.

Karl Malden, Carol Stone, Douglas Watson, Lou Polan and George Mitchell give excellent performances within Clurman's design. If their portrayals seem to lack spontaneity on occasion, it is not their fault. They are merely carrying out their assignments meticulously.

It should be reported that a representative first-night audience greeted the revival with enthusiasm. And there were rumors that the production may be moved to another theatre after its scheduled two weeks at the ANTA Playhouse because of the demand for tickets.

"Desire Under the Elms" should be seen by students of the drama since it is one of the major works of America's first winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. And it has proved its drawing power over the years. It holds the admiration of many, if not of this reviewer.

DAILY NEWS

January 17, 1952

'Desire Under the Elms' Remains Powerful, if Just a Leetle Quaint

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Another first-class O'Neill revival, "Desire Under the Elms," has come to add spice and color to the Broadway playbill. It was offered last evening by the American National Theatre and Academy at its playhouse on W. 52d St., and at the close an audience composed largely of theatre people voiced generous cheers for a good company which includes Karl Malden, Carol Stone and Douglas Watson.

Within the fine setting by Mordecai Gorelik and under the able direction of Harold Clurman, "Desire Under the Elms" is one of ANTA's best efforts—an intelligent and forceful revival of a drama which is important in the history of the American stage. It offers just about all one could expect of it at this date, and if it looks more than a little quaint now it is the fault of time, not the production.

Grim, Hard Drama.

O'Neill wrote "Desire Under the Elms" in 1924, three years after "Anna Christie." By then he had acquired his belief in the essential tragedy of humankind, and "Desire" is a grim, hard play about grim, hard people—the rockbound, rock-hating New Englanders of the middle 19th Century. Yet, for all the relentlessness of its drama, it strikes me now as being a shade fancy and quite selfconscious. O'Neill's fondness for repetition, not noticeable in "Anna Christie," is rather embarrassingly evident. Last night I was not impressed when, every few minutes, somebody looked at the sky or at Ephraim Cabot's farm and said, "Purty," or "Purty, ain't it?" And the New England dialect soon be-

gan to sound like a recitation by Jack Pearl.

Lots of Red Meat.

However, there is a lot of stuff in this O'Neill piece. Plenty of sex, many words of lust. Jealousy and greed. An amount of cursing and praying. Great quantities of hate, for nobody but nobody loves nobody, except for the sinful attachment of young Eben Cabot and his father's new wife. There's murder, too—of a misbegotten baby. And when Eben and his stepmother are led away to stand trial for this murder, the sheriff pauses to look at the farm and say, admiringly, "Purty."

Karl Malden does a praiseworthy job of playing chin-whiskered, hard-minded, grimly righteous, 76-year-old Ephraim Cabot, who has buried two wives, hates three sons and exults only in his possession of the farm. This role calls for great dramatic strength, and Malden supplies it. Miss Stone also is admirable as the old man's young wife, and Watson is good as the cheating young son.

"Desire Under the Elms" is scheduled for two weeks at the ANTA Playhouse.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 17, 1952

'Desire Under the Elms'

By WALTER F. KERR

"DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS," Eugene O'Neill's brooding study of the New England greed for land, and the loves and lusts that are born of it, is—by reputation if not by frequent production—a contemporary American classic, and we may be grateful this morning to ANTA for giving us a good, workmanlike look at it.

Harold Clurman has opened the American National Theater and Academy's second season by mounting a careful, honest, and sometimes stirring production of the twenty-eight-year-old play. He has some fine actors to work with—Carol Stone, Karl Malden and Douglas Watson among them—and he has guided them painstakingly through the bitter repressions and finally frenzied outbursts of O'Neill's thwarted people.

O'Neill was searching for a classic statement — one which should be simple, spare, and yet exalted—of the inhibiting and destructive forces which, in the last century and by implication even now, reduced so much of the American dream, and the American love of the soil, to bleak and barren selfishness. He was looking, too, for a rejuvenating force, one which should liberate his people from the stone walls they had built around themselves and yet not destroy the genuine passion that had gone into the building.

For his central symbol O'Neill chose the seventy-six-year-old patriarch, Ephraim Cabot—a man who prides himself on his Yankee toughness, whose sons long for his death and their share of the land, and who, at the opening of the play, brings to the homestead a new young bride. The girl is as acquisitive as the rest of them and, determined to bear a son who will inherit and secure the farm she has won, she seduces the youngest of her stepsons. Her selfish act turns unexpectedly to love and, before she can break the web of deceit she has woven, she must sacrifice herself, her lover and her child to righteous gods.

* * *

Harold Clurman's production illuminates both the tangle of passion and its ultimate resolution with great clarity. If there is anything wrong with the staging he has given the play, it is his too earnest determination that nothing shall be missed, that every O'Neill nuance shall be savored and resavored, that the physical production shall be even cleaner and more classic of line than O'Neill intended.

The first act suffers particularly from constant overstress. The Cabot brothers looking out over their fields, dreaming of fresh conquests in California, and wrangling among themselves over the future, are treated almost ritualistically, as though director Clurman were bent on turning O'Neill's simple exposition into an earth-dance. Dialect is mercilessly accented and O'Neill's rhythmic repetition of phrases is driven so hard as to border on parody.

* * *

This shell of self-conscious manner is not broken until Carol Stone, as the ambitious new wife, makes her entrance. Miss Stone keeps hold of a medallion-like poise, but drives into the part a core of earthy and biting reality. She is most successful among the players in blending O'Neill's humanity with his struggle after larger meanings, and her performance builds to a shocking and moving climax.

As O'Neill gets deeper into his materials, and the turbulent undercurrents of the play break into the open, Douglas Watson and Karl Malden begin to catch fire, too, and the third act achieves much of the cumulative theatrical power which is O'Neill's soundest gift.

The ANTA production of "Desire Under the Elms" has its share of flaws—chief among them a tendency to over-elaborate the manner of the play at the expense of its dramatic vitality—but it is a thoroughly craftsmanlike piece of work, and worth a visit.

New York World-Telegram and The ~~Evening~~ Sun

January 17, 1952

'Desire Under the Elms' Revived

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The new ANTA subscription season got going last night with a full-blooded, passionate performance of Eugene O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms." The unleashed exuberance of the cast was equaled by the audience at the closing curtain, and the occasion was clearly a happy one for everybody.

The 25-year-old drama is an extraordinary play on anybody's terms, at any time. Harold Clurman, the director, approached it with an attack that calls for full orchestral effects from all the actors. They rode out the emotional hurricane with uncompromising enthusiasm and high effect.

"Desire Under the Elms" is a stark, hard play about the elemental overblown passions of lonely, greedy people. Over and above there is repeated the possessive claim of "my farm" or "my home." In the end the acquisitive desires burn themselves out, and carnal jealousies have brought disaster on an entire family.

Inevitable Tragedy.

The elderly father brings home a third wife. As his two older sons see their last chance of owning the rough farm disappear, they set out for California and the gold they all think lies on the ground there.

The younger son remains, determined to rescue his dead mother's interest in the land so she can rest in peace. In the fight with his new stepmother for proprietorship of the place he gradually is led by her to fall in love with her and to father her child.

The situation plainly has no solution except complete tragedy, and that is what is visited on the participants, with an Old Testament vengeance of real grandeur and terror.

A Chunk of Granite.

It is up to Karl Malden to dominate the drama as the aging, indomitable father, and he does. He moves with a granite-like stiffness, even in his wild, hard-jointed dance, always holding himself as if he were pushing a great load up a steep hill. His speech has the echo of fanatics in the pulpit, and when in the end he loses emotional control he is like an ancient maniacal prophet.

Of all the performances, the most surprising is Carol Stone's as the lonely, ambitious girl who uses the father and loves the son. She achieves great simplicity and control, and plays the turbulent emotions with tremendous power. She acts with what seems endless emotional resource, and has it all strictly channeled for her immediate purposes.

Progressively Effective.

Douglas Watson establishes the son with a hot-headed joyousness that gives way to rueful bitterness as he is more and more enmeshed in the passionate snarl. It is a free-riding performance of progressive effectiveness, which will be even better when he exactly calculates the reserve he needs for the final big rejection of his mistress.

Lou Polan and George Mitchell set a striking mood with the monosyllabic and repetitious counterpoint of conversation in the opening sequence, as they admire the farm and rebel against it.

Mordecai Gorelik has given the play a vivid, factual 1850 setting which reveals the entire house and suggests its landscape.

"The Shrike"

New York Post

January 16, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

An Angry and Impressive Drama

Out of what is clearly a deep and impassioned conviction, Joseph Kramm has written a grim and harrowing play about a man tormented in a psychiatric ward, which he calls "The Shrike," and which the amazingly talented Jose Ferrer produced, staged and acted in superlatively at the Cort Theater last night. Although Mr. Kramm's approach to his subject is documentary, he does not pretend to be a cool and objective author, and his drama is angry, embittered, tortured and unrelenting. There is no doubt that it is immensely depressing, but there is also little question that it is, for most of the time, remarkably enthralling.

A shrike, as some of us, including this observer, are learning for the first time, is a predatory bird, and Mr. Kramm applies the name to the wife of the victim in his play. It is she, he points out, who is responsible for her husband's attempted suicide, and it is her persecution that keeps him a prisoner in the ward until he escapes by becoming a docile, hypocritical liar. There is seemingly no end to the author's hatred for the abominable woman, and, when his central character is freed from his prison only by accepting a return to her clutches, it is one of the most unhappy endings in stage history. Mr. Kramm is an unrelenting playwright.

Anger And Sympathy

He is also a man of the most passionate indignation, and he never leaves one in the dark as to his sympathy and his hatred. The sympathy is all for the would-be suicide and the other hapless inmates of the ward in the city hospital. His hatred is not only for the wife, but for most of the psychiatrists and nurses as they persecute or misunderstand the victims placed in their charge. The bitterest point he has to make is that, once in their grasp, a sane man would have an almost impossible task proving his sanity and that only by surrendering his honesty and becoming a hypocrite can he possibly escape from them.

It is unquestionably an overwrought and one-sided dramatic picture that Mr. Kramm has to paint, and, despite his skill at credible detail and his angry sincerity, "The Shrike" might seem monotonous and unrelieved in its fury were it not for the brilliance that Mr. Ferrer has brought to his production. He has staged the play to virtual perfection, casting even its most minor roles with complete reality and giving its significant details both credibility and showmanship. The ending is implacably honest but dramatically unsatisfying, but even here Mr. Ferrer's acting saves it.

The Ferrer Acting

If Jose Ferrer were merely versatile, his ability to combine acting, directing and producing would still be impressive. But it happens that he handles all of his tasks with prodigious talent. He is, as we have long known, one of the ablest actors in the theater, and he has never given a finer performance than he provides as the hero-victim of "The Shrike." It is a highly sympathetic role, but he never falls back on mere audience appeal for his effectiveness. He offers a completely rounded and entirely understanding characterization of the unfortunate fellow, and never fails to make him also a dramatic figure.

Judith Evelyn has the title role of the fiendish wife, and I think she handles it with remarkable persuasiveness, considering the fact that Mr. Kramm has handicapped her by giving the wife no big scenes and no touch of humanity. The other roles are briefer, but all of the actors play with utter conviction, and there are particularly good portrayals by Kendall Clark, Philip Huston, Will Kuluva, Martin Newman and Mary Bell. You will certainly not have a pleasant evening at "The Shrike," but thanks to the author's outraged sincerity and Mr. Ferrer's all-around skill, you are likely to have an enthralling one.

"THE SHRIKE"

Play by Joseph Kramm; staged by Jose Ferrer; scenery by Howard Bay; costumes by Edith Lutyens; presented by Mr. Ferrer in association with Milton Baron at the Cort Theatre, January 15, 1952. The cast:

Miss Cardell.....Phyllis Hill
Fleming.....Tom Reynolds
Miss Hansen..Jennette Dowling
Dr. Kramer.....Stephen Elliott
Perkins..James Hawthorne Bey
Grossberg.....William Bush
Dr. Barrow.....Isabel Bonner
Patient.....Vincent Donahue
Ann Downs.....Judith Evelyn
Jim Downs.....Jose Ferrer
Dr. Schlesinger..Somer Alberg
Sam Tager.....Will Lee
George O'Brien..Martin Newman
Joe Major.....Joe Comadore
Don Gregory.....Philip Huston
John Ankoritis.....Will Kuluva
Frank Carlisle...Leigh Whipper
William Schloss..Billy M. Greene
Dr. Bellman.....Kendall Clark
Miss Wingate.....Mary Bell
Harry Downs.....Edward Platt
Tom Blair.....Arthur Jarrett

New York Herald Tribune

January 16, 1952

'The Shrike'

By WALTER F. KERR

"THE SHRIKE," which opened at the Cort Tuesday night, is a cold and merciless examination of the processes by which an intelligent and normally sensitive human being can be utterly destroyed. It is a relentless, bitter, and clinical piece of stage work, and the way Jose Ferrer is playing it, Joseph Kramm's study in cannibalism packs the wallop of a pile driver.

Author Kramm spares neither his audiences nor his principal actor. He introduces us to Jim Downs, his out-of-work young theatrical director, as he is wheeled into City Hospital after an attempt at suicide. Shortly thereafter we meet his estranged wife—the predatory bird of the title—and watch her nurse the unwilling Jim back to life. Gradually, and mostly through indirection, we discover that she wants to bind him to her forever, and that she is willing to destroy not only his reputation, but his mind as well, to do it.

* * *

She is abetted in this by the incompetent hospital staff, by the pretensions of psychiatry, by the legal statutes which forbid his release except in the care of his wife. At the end of the play, Jim Downs accepts these conditions as the price of his freedom, and walks away into an eternal private hell.

It is up to Jose Ferrer to sustain the unrelieved tension, the almost sadistic drive of Mr. Kramm's savage and not wholly plausible tale, and he does it with a performance that is downright magnificent.

Mr. Ferrer does not indulge himself in the part. He plays it quietly, straightforwardly, with a restraint that is terrifying. He builds the characterization around three key scenes. In the first of these he registers the simple dismay of an ordinarily intelligent man who finds himself confined in a mental institution. In the second, he builds the frustration and the agony of having to accept himself as a virtual imbecile. In the third, he sweats out the horror of having to feign sanity and good will when his mind is finally at the breaking point. In all of this, there is nothing showy, nothing colorful to help him out. Dressed in hospital whites and pinned rigidly to a single position for the full duration of each scene, he manages a range of emotional suggestion that is all but incredible. With every inflection he gains steadily in power, and by the final curtain he has put you through the holocaust with him.

* * *

It is an old chestnut of the theater that a fine actor can make sense of the telephone book. Mr. Ferrer is asked to demonstrate his sanity, midway through "The Shrike," by counting backward from a hundred by sevens, and his personal feat in bringing it off may well establish a new legend.

Without Mr. Ferrer, "The Shrike" might well be in trouble. There is some question whether Mr. Kramm has written a play at all. The principal characters never come into head-on clash, and the tension is developed almost in the absence of drama. The hospital atmosphere is thoroughly believable; but the machinations of its singularly obtuse officials are surely more convenient than credible. Mr. Kramm piles the macabre on the macabre as he virtually roasts his man on a spit, and, in a lesser performance, the whole charade might crack under its determined melodrama.

* * *

The author has got further help from Judith Evelyn as the blood-sucking wife. Actually, Miss Evelyn's character is established most fully by others, when she is not on stage, and when she is on she must play against the undercurrents of the role. She performs a small miracle in intimating the savagery and the single-mindedness of this woman at the same time that she creates, inexplicably, some sympathy for herself.

There are more than twenty other performers in the piece, and they are one and all excellent. Edward Platt, as Jim's realistic brother, and Mary Bell, as a high-handed hospital nurse, make brief moments count and Joe Comadore, Will Kuluva, Kendall Clark and Leigh Whipper are especially interesting.

"The Shrike" is a cold-blooded bit of theatrical manufacture, but there is tremendous fire in its performances.

The New York Times

January 16, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having a few idle moments on his hands, José Ferrer has produced and directed a play in which he acts the leading role. This is generally a good idea on Mr. Ferrer's part, and particularly so in the present instance. For Joseph Kramm's "The Shrike," which opened at the Cort last evening, is a plausible melodrama that is likely to scare the living daylights out of you and that provokes Mr. Ferrer into giving an exciting performance.

Some theatregoers may regard the word "melodrama" as intolerably trifling. For "The Shrike" is concerned with the experiences of an intelligent man with a pleasant personality who gets trapped in a mental hospital and has to wrestle with the staff psychiatrists. Psychiatry being one of the learned sciences, this column probably should be more respectful toward a play set in the mental ward of a city hospital and presided over by scholarly men with notebooks, fountain pens and an air of noble condescension.

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But against the respectful view of "The Shrike" is the fact that Mr. Ferrer dotes on theatrical plays that are taut with impending doom. Note, also, that Judith Evelyn, who plays opposite Mr. Ferrer, was tortured almost to death in "Angel Street" eleven years ago. She has been entitled to revenge for quite a long time.

"The Shrike" is the play in which she gets it. She is the wife of Jim Downs, the part acted by Mr. Ferrer. As a token of his esteem for her, he has tried to commit suicide just before the play opens. After his immediate recovery, the hospital holds him in the mental ward for observation. She malevolently poisons the doctors' minds against him.

Since he cannot be released except with her consent and in her custody, "The Shrike" is the melodrama of a sane man trapped in a mental hospital and driven practically insane by the impersonal treatment.

* * *

Although Mr. Kramm has written it in the form of a documentary, the development of the story is sharp and austere. And the production and performance are superb. For scenery Howard Bay has designed a bleak hospital ward that looks like a prison. Closed in from all sides, the performance becomes increasingly portentous as the story progresses.

There is a long cast of inmates, attendants, nurses and doctors. The parts have been cast with a flair for variety among actors who know how to make small scenes fit into a vivid panoramic picture. But the parts Miss Evelyn and Mr. Ferrer play carry the full charge of the story.

Miss Evelyn's thin, haggard, elusive acting is extraordinarily effective. It is hard to believe that such a fragile woman can be so cruel; but it is terrifying, once you realize how shrewdly she is succeeding. Mr. Ferrer is at the top of his bent. As the man who gets slapped into a mental ward, his portrait of hopelessness and despair and of resolution is theatrical, without being cheap or maudlin. For Mr. Ferrer has real genius for the theatre. He is not afraid of strong scenes, but he has taste enough to subordinate them to the play.

According to the program, the shrike is "a predatory bird." Our local ornithologists know him as the "butcher bird" in recognition of the unpleasant habit he has of murdering birds wantonly and impaling them on thorns. Since there is no malice in the shrike, only a fondness for slaughter, Mr. Kramm's title is not really apposite. But that is the only reservation this column has about Mr. Kramm's economically written melodrama. Mr. Ferrer has staged it with relish, and he plays it with power and dexterity.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 16, 1952

'Shrike' Is Harrowing In Its Suspense

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A remarkable amount of suspense is aroused by "The Shrike." The new play is a harrowing drama, which may strike you as being of undeterminable significance.

The issue concerns the technical sanity of a man who has attempted to kill himself. The play fails to achieve importance because it never makes clear whether, or to what degree, the man is mentally off center. The argument can be made that such cases are hardly ever clear in real life, and this may well be true. The trouble is that such cloudy issues make cloudy theater.

The story is starkly portrayed against the grim background of a city hospital, where the central character has been brought unconscious from an overdose of sleeping pills.

Wife's Dependent.

It shortly becomes clear that his deserted wife has no intention of getting him out of the place, as long as he remains dependent on her while a patient. He has previously turned to another girl, who does not appear.

The play never quite comes clean on the issue of whether the wife really loves him and is acting for his best interests, as she sees them. She alienates the pupils from whom he has made a living, gives up his apartment, moves his belongings back to hers, and generally makes it inevitable that he return to her.

Reasonable Excuse.

Although the name of the play suggests that she is a villainess, since the shrike of the title is a vicious marauding bird, there is a perfectly reasonable excuse for everything she does.

Finally the man begins to wonder about his own sanity, distracted as he is by contact with other mental cases. He is convinced by his brother that unless he agrees to return permanently to his wife, she can legally shut him up for good.

This point sounds far fetched. Even if it is good law, it is unbelievable drama. But the personal story is always muddy, partly because so little is known of the characters outside their immediate situation in the hospital, and partly because the character, intentions and mental stability of neither of them is entirely clear.

The tension and excitement come from the idea that a man who is apparently sane, beyond only a dejected attempt at suicide to get insurance for a wife he dislikes, might be driven into an irrational state by incarceration in a mental ward. This is illustrated to be an overpowering and horrifying situation.

Title Belied.

Jose Ferrer, who produced and directed the play, enacts the victim with taut restraint that gives individual sequences much more conviction than the play has as a whole.

Judith Evelyn is his wife, minimizing the horrific aspects of the lady, and generally pointing up her good intentions, so the character is believable even if the title is belied.

Isabel Bonner and Philip Huston play the more normal staff members of the hospital, and Kendall Clark is saddled with a completely unconvincing part—manipulated carefully for plot purposes—of a doctor.

Phyllis Hill has some nice moments as a nurse, and Will Kuluva is jovial as one of the happier patients.

Journal-American

January 16, 1952

Humor and Pathos In 'Nasty Nightmare'

By JOHN McCLAIN

Jose Ferrer arrived at the Cort Theatre last evening with a soothing little bijou called "The Shrike," such being described in my dictionary as a bird which "often impales its prey on thorns . . ." That's about what happens to Mr. Ferrer for more than two hours, and it was surprising to me that a posse didn't rise out of the audience in the last act and free him from his terrible torture. Seldom has anyone been so beset so long.

The arch villain in this case, the cause of his personal inquisition, is Judith Evelyn, who plays the part of the wife from whom he is separated. She would be The Shrike. All poor Ferrer wanted to do was take 156 sleeping pills and commit suicide, but they found him in time and took him off to City Hospital and pumped out his stomach and got him back on his feet.

It becomes apparent to him at this point that he is in the psychopathic ward, and that his exit ain't going to be easy. His wife is the only person that can get him sprung and she won't do same until she's sure he'll come back to her and behave himself.

* * *

A Spectacle!

For the ensuing two hours we are treated to the horrendous spectacle of a person we believe to be sane trying to talk himself past the battery of hospital psychoanalysts to freedom, not realiz-

ing until the last that his wife is thwarting his efforts.

It is not exactly a novel idea for either stage or cinema; it is even a rather common nightmare. But I doubt that it has ever before been presented with more uncompromising attention to each gruesome detail. And certainly Miss Evelyn is way ahead in the season's sweepstakes as the most persistent and unconscionable heavy of them all.

Mr. Ferrer succeeds in carrying a man-eating part through the entire proceedings, never allowing a wayward eye to leave him while he's on stage. He is capable of incredible feats of both over- and under-acting, but he plays several long question-and-answer scenes with the examining medico and gets excitement into the fact that he is able to come up with quick answers to such queries as: "Who is the mayor of New York?"

This is a first effort by the playwright, Joseph Kramm, and it is notable. There is considerable humor, a touch of pathos when needed, and within the limits of my knowledge the characters spoke as I believe they might.

I regret to say, however, that the ending is highly unfulfilled.

* * *

As the final curtain is rung down there seem to me only two alternatives open to Mr. Ferrer. He must either take 256 sleeping pills and REALLY kill himself—or he must kill The Shrike.

As a director Mr. Ferrer has done a most creditable job. The supporting cast, much too large to mention, performed with extreme competence down to the last man—a fellow who sat in bed and stared at an imaginary spot for most of one scene. Howard Bay achieved a small miracle with the sets, making it possible to make five changes within a single act merely by blacking-out the stage.

This will probably be a highly controversial offering. I would score it a clean hit, however, since I will defy anybody to come away from the Cort without a strenuous opinion on the merits of the play — and the pleasant realization that it was, after all, just a nasty nightmare.

Daily Mirror

January 16, 1952

'The Shrike' Strikes Oil As Outstanding Drama

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The moral of "The Shrike," if it really has one, seems to be: if you try to commit suicide in a big city, make sure you do a good job of it. Jim Downs, separated from his wife and despondent over his inability to get very far as a play director, took an overdose of sleeping pills and landed in the psychiatric ward of a public hospital.

By the time the doctors brought him out of his coma, the wife had made such a favorable impression on the attendants that they were all on her side. Only Jim knew her for the "shrike," or predatory bird, that she was. Sound again and quite sensitive, he sought to get out, to discover, that legally, only his wife had the power to obtain his release.

And obtain his release she would not. Her sense of possession, her hatred for another woman in his life, prompted her to employ all her cunning to keep him behind hospital bars. Tortured by the indignities and idiocies to which he was subjected, Jim finally knuckled under, lied to the psychiatrists when he wanted to tell the truth and feigned love for the dissembling spouse to get his freedom.

He was trapped for life, and he knew it. There, dramatist Joseph Kramm leaves Jim. He probably has another script in mind. The script about what will happen to Jim and the shrike in their uneasy truce. It no doubt will strike a tragic note, too, but we hope it will be as absorbing and as gripping as the current work.

Jose Ferrer produced "The Shrike" with Milton Baron. He also directed it. And he gives a stirring, terrifying performance as the unfortunate Jim Downs. It is, perhaps, Ferrer's acting masterpiece. He seemed to be as deeply moved by Jim's plight as were many of us out front in the Cort Theatre last evening.

Judith Evelyn is tremendously effective in the title role. She achieves ruthlessness and relentlessness with admirable restraint. Her portrayal of the vengeful woman is honest and trenchant. It is ironic that Miss Evelyn won critical acclaim some seasons ago in "Angel Street," as a wife driven to the verge of insanity by a villainous husband. Here, the tables are reversed.

There are fine contributions by Philip Huston, Edward Platt, Will Kuluva, Mary Bell, Kendall Clark and Arthur Jarrett. And salutes also are due Phyllis Hill, Stephen Elliott, Tom Reynolds, William Bush, Isabel Bonner, Somer Alberg, Will Lee, Martin Newman, Joe Comadore, Leigh Whipper and Billy M. Greene.

Howard Bay's re-creation of a bleak psychiatric ward is so realistic as to fairly reek of disinfectant.

"The Shrike" is the best drama the season has given us so far. And Joseph Kramm is the most promising new playwright. This is not a pleasant play. It is not for escapist playgoers. It will scare the blazes out of you. It will wrack your nerves. It will make you think, and keep you sitting tensely on the edge of your seat through all of its three tense acts.

DAILY NEWS

January 16, 1952

Jose Ferrer, Judith Evelyn Make 'The Shrike' an Absorbing Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Shrike," by Joseph Kramm, is an odd play, a good play and a fascinating play. Its first performance at the Cort Theatre last evening has left me emotionally frazzled, and filled with admiration for the writing, the playing by Jose Ferrer, Judith Evelyn and other members of a good company, and for Ferrer's staging of the drama. But I warn you that it is not a pastime, but an experience—a grim experience.

"The Shrike" is odd because it has practically no movement in the ordinary sense of the stage; people do come and go, of course, but their passing is not important. What real movement there is, is unseen, for it takes place in the mind. It is a psychological drama in the true sense—yet it never is tricky. It is a good play because of this lack of trickiness, and it is fascinating in its cold and relentless telling of the small but awful things that happen to a man in the psycho ward of a big city hospital.

Extraordinary Tension.

Ferrer plays a man who has been brought to this ward after an attempt at suicide. Miss Evelyn is his wife—a loving wife whose devotion and tireless attention help to pull him through. Why did Ferrer take 156 sleeping pills? Why is Miss Evelyn so devoted when he left her for another girl three months ago? And how does society—as represented by a city's own hospital—regard a man whose only misdeed has been to try to destroy himself?

The answers to these questions make the play, building it into a work of extraordinary tension. The title is a key answer; the dictionary describes a shrike as a bird which may be predatory, or which may impale its victims on thorns. Ferrer is the victim, Miss Evelyn the bird—a heartlessly possessive woman who has impaled her husband on a most agonizing thorn. The only way he can get out of this hospital, with all its hapless patients, its maddening routine, its prying psychiatrists, is to submit to his wife—to give himself up, physically and spiritually, to a woman he no longer loves.

A Genuine Hiss.

As Ferrer plays it, very quietly but with enormous effect, this destruction of a whole man is a horrifying thing. Playing in the same key and with equal effect is Miss Evelyn, and at one moment last evening she was hissed. This was a genuine hiss, spontaneous; I can't recall having heard anything like it in the modern theatre.

There are many other effective performances in "The Shrike"—the playing of Will Kuluva, Martin Newman, Billy M. Greene, Joe Comadore and Leigh Whipper as psycho types; Stephen Elliott and Philip Huston as doctors; Mary Bell as a nurse, Isabel Bonner as a psychiatrist and Edward Platt as a visiting relative. Howard Bay's set is no more than a background of tall, dirty, screened windows, with some hospital beds, tables and screens below them—and it is admirable in its simple effectiveness.

I repeat, "The Shrike" is no pastime—but if you see it you will not soon forget it. It is Kramm's first play, and I hope he has some more in him.

"Fancy Meeting You Again"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 15, 1952

'Fancy Meeting You Again'

By WALTER F. KERR

THIS is no time to be reviewing George Kaufman's television show, but if I were not in the habit of catching it on Sunday nights, I would begin to suspect that the old master of the caustic wisecrack had gone soft. Mr. Kaufman wrote "Fancy Meeting You Again," which opened at the Royale Monday night, in collaboration with his wife, Leueen MacGrath. It may be that Mr. Kaufman gets awfully mellow around the house. Or it may be that he is pouring all irreverence into his television appearances. Whatever the cause, "Fancy Meeting You Again" is a remarkably pallid comedy to be coming from the pen of one of the wittiest men of our time.

Part of the authors' troubles stem from their notion that the subject of reincarnation is automatically funny. They are concerned with the plight of an attractive and energetic female who has spent 5,000 years tracking down her man, without ever trapping him into matrimony. We first meet her in a wedding gown, in the year 1952, as she is about to make a marriage of convenience with somebody else. But she cannot go through with it—she hasn't put in that 5,000-year chase for nothing—and, chucking the prospective bridegroom, she proceeds to get happily plastered on champagne.

This is the cue for the first of several flashbacks, and we pick up our determined lass in the stone age, begging to be tapped by her negligent cave man. Later, we see her as a Roman slave-girl, still on the trail, hot for her lover whose current reincarnation has turned him a shepherd boy.

* * *

These jocular forays into ancient history do have their moments of fun, especially—as might be expected with Mr. Kaufman directing—when it comes to sight gags. The spectacle of Margaret Hamilton running about in a bearskin is pretty hard to resist, and Miss MacGrath dries her eyes very prettily on a leopard-skin handkerchief. But there really isn't much more to the entertainment than these random, and fairly easy, devices. Principally, the authors have no point of view toward their subject, no satiric edge. Instead of using the reincarnation materials to make a biting, or even a genial, comment on the age-old cussedness of the male-female relationship, they simply drop the nonsense in our laps in the mild hope that it will pick up laughs as it goes along.

The authors are a lot better off in the present tense. The girl, in her contemporary manifestation, is a fashionable sculpturess, and while her latest monstrosity is being given the once-over by an art critic—who turns out to be the man of her historic dreams—or when it is being turned down by the Hokinsonesque club-woman who has commissioned it, there are flashes of grumpy sarcasm and good sophisticated fun. But even here the absence of satirical attitude cuts the ground from beneath the comedy, forcing it to stand on isolated lines. And the effort to pull the flashbacks and the present together results in such far-fetched inventions as the business of blackmailing the club-woman with the information that, in *her* earlier incarnation, she ran a bordello.

* * *

Though the story-line just trickles along, some handsome and resourceful people do a lot to give it intermittent interest. Miss MacGrath plays her sculptress in an elegant, slightly dreamy, and extremely stylized fashion: if she has to push a bit, it is obviously with the intention of making the laughs bigger than they have any right to be. In any event, her pale, porcelain good looks are awfully easy on the eyes. Walter Matthau, as her itinerant lover, plays with truculent charm; Glenn Langan is suitably stuffy as an endlessly rejected male, and Margaret Hamilton is as cheerfully waspish as ever. Ruth McDevitt has a nice bit as a club-woman whose every remark is a formal address, and Richard Purdy plays a modern-style button-moulder with finesse. It is Mr. Purdy's task to set the moods whenever the play lapses into fantasy. And it is characteristic of the evening that with each of his slow, eerie entrances, he casts a real chill on the play.

"FANCY MEETING YOU AGAIN"

Comedy by George S. Kaufman and Leueen MacGrath; staged by Mr. Kaufman; settings by Albert Johnson; costumes by Kathleen Ankers; presented by Chandler Cowles and Ben Segal at the Royale Theatre, January 14, 1952. The cast:

Judge Patterson.. Reynolds Evans
Martin Vellabrook.. Glenn Langan
Amanda Phipps..... Leueen MacGrath
Lucy Bascomb..... Margaret Hamilton
Millie.....Vera Fuller Mellish
A Visitor.....Richard Purdy
Sinclair Heybore..... Walter Matthau
Mrs. Cornelius.. Ruth McDevitt
1st Nubian.... Ellsworth Wright
2nd Nubian.....Earl Jones

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 15, 1952

5000-Year Man Chase Staged

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Last night's new play is a thoroughly pleasing experience which never exhilarates you for more than a few moments at a time.

"Fancy Meeting You Again" tells of a sculptress who had been in love with the same man through various incarnations over a period of 5000 years. It is not difficult to imagine the humor that springs from finding her contemporaries in various novel relationships in choice moments of history.

There are flashes of enchanting humor in the play, and they are scattered around like random brilliants on a loosely knitted sweater. For the situation has no real shape. It is inclined to be raggedy.

Ex-Lives Fantasy.

The heroine has fashioned an enormous statue which attracts the horrified attention of an art critic. He is discovered to be the lover of all her past lives, the man to whom she has always succumbed, and who has never quite wanted to marry her. The girl is hipped on the subject of her former lives, a distinct disadvantage when it turns out the critic's mother has deviled his entire youth with her similar fantasies.

The switches back and forth from fantasy to reality are handled with aplomb. The trouble with the shifts to the past is that they seem to be more like explanations of a joke than to be very humorous themselves.

One of the choicest ideas of the play is sadly neglected as the girl insists she was a shepherdess outside ancient Rome, then is revealed as having been a highly salable article of trade.

Lacks Tension.

Even for a light comedy, the play lacks tension. This may spring from the fact that only in the last act is the heroine confronted with a time limit on her problem of getting her man.

Leueen MacGrath, co-author of the play with her husband, George S. Kaufman, who directed it, plays the central figure of the sculptress in a highly delectable manner. Walter Matthau is her agreeable quarry, in a homely, relaxed manner which suggests he is just what this ravishing but intense artist needs.

Margaret Hamilton is of inestimable aid as a secretary, who is a sort of visiting relative in the past. With her crystal comic sense she makes little geysers of humor out of fleeting situations, and always sees that her laugh lines score.

Perpetual Loser.

Glenn Langan is pictorial and assertive as the man destined always to lose the lively lady. Ruth McDevitt has a couple of wonderful scenes as a prominent club-woman who cannot resist talking as if she was making a speech. Reynolds Evans is familiarly expert as an indignant official.

Among the play's many humorous moments, none are more effective than the opening and closing curtains, both of them situations which assert their comic purpose immediately.

The New York Times

January 15, 1952

'Fancy Meeting You Again' Is a Comedy of Reincarnation by the George S. Kaufmans

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In another incarnation it may be possible to take a more cordial view of "Fancy Meeting You Again," which opened at the Royale last evening. It is a comedy about reincarnation by George S. Kaufman and Leueen MacGrath, with Miss MacGrath in the leading part. From the point of view of the audiences who are currently incarnated on Broadway, it is not up to the standard of anything on which Mr. Kaufman has collaborated before; and it is not very good, even by less exacting standards.

The authors are considering the problems of a fashionable New York sculptress who has been trying to marry the same man for five thousand years. At present he is an art critic—entitled, as the sculptress remarks, to his own opinion, no matter how stupid it may be. In previous incarnations he has been a cave-man and a Roman shepherd—on each occasion a little less objectionable than his betters, but wily enough to take love without offering marriage. In his present incarnation he does offer marriage and a happy ending for the play.

* * *

Like almost anything else, this is an amusing enough idea for a play provided someone settles down to write it. But it is difficult to escape the impression that Mr. and Mrs. Kaufman have not got much farther than setting down an outline from which they might write a play sometime. "Fancy Meeting You Again" seems to have been written at random about characters who necessarily repeat a similar pattern every time they meet as they hop and skip through the centuries. They get to be monotonous people; and they are not sprightly conversationalists.

In Mr. Kaufman's previous incarnations (the last one being in the century of "Guys and Dolls") he has presided over livelier performances. "Fancy Meeting You Again" probably needs capricious direction—by a leprechaun, if possible. Mr. Kaufman's precise and laconic style does not give the play much lightness or fancy.

Thanks to Albert Johnson's bold and sweeping settings, and Kathleen Anders' beautiful costumes, the production is most attractive. So is Miss MacGrath, handsomely attired as the ageless, pursuing lady. But it is to be feared that her acting is not much more resourceful than the writing.

Playing a more idiomatic part as a skeptical handmaid, Margaret Hamilton gives an entertaining performance in a familiar style. Walter Matthau is pleasantly saturnine as the elusive male; and there are agreeable performances by Ruth McDevitt, Richard Purdy and Reynolds Evans. But they cannot do much with a script that is unresponsive. After covering a marathon of five thousand years "Fancy Meeting You Again" does not have much life left for today.

Daily Mirror

January 15, 1952

'Fancy Meeting You Again' Just Doesn't Come Off

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Fancy Meeting You Again" has so much about it to like that we wish we could like it all. It boasts an imaginative idea and some hilarious situations and dialogue. But it is terribly thin. It doesn't quite come off. This, despite the fact that it was penned by the George S. Kaufmans, staged by Kaufman and stars Mrs. Kaufman (Leueen MacGrath).

It has to do with an attractive young sculptress who has a habit of ditching her grooms at the altar just before the minister or the judge pronounce the binding words. That's because she believes in reincarnation, and at the crucial moment her thoughts revert to a lover whom she has been chasing for 5,000 years.

She has met this Romeo in many guises: as a caveman in charge of public morals, as a Roman shepherd who lectures on philosophy in a house of ill repute, as an Egyptian playboy, etc. She meets him in this life as an archeologist and art critic. And when it looks as though she's finally landed her elusive prey, he flees in terror upon learning of her mystic notions.

He has been driven to a psychiatrist by his mother's fixed idea that she has undergone a number of existences, in all of which she has been a queen or an empress. It has been pretty trying for him and his father. But he finally decides to make an honest woman of the hammer-and-chisel expert. Particularly, since her remembrance of things past helps him locate a rare Egyptian palace.

Miss MacGrath is charming as the artist with the vivid imagination and one-track mind. Walter Matthau is good as the ultimate object of her affections. And there are helpful performances by Ruth McDevitt, Reynolds Evans, Margaret Hamilton and Glenn Langan.

Albert Johnson has designed a serviceable set, which the critic rightly describes as extremely functional. Kathleen Ankers has devised costumes that are alternately eye-filling and humorous. And the Museum of Modern Art set may like the statues provided by Martha Albert and William Pacelli. Personally, we prefer Praxiteles and Phidias.

It is easy to see why Chandler Cowles and Ben Segal thought it worth while to install "Fancy Meeting You Again" in the Royale Theatre last evening. For it is a sometimes clever, sometimes amusing, fantastic comedy. But such jests are difficult to sustain for three acts. And even the gifted Kaufmans are unable to keep the fascinating bubble shimmering aloft for a trio of cantos.

DAILY NEWS

January 15, 1952

Girl Takes 5,000 Years to Get Her Man in 'Fancy Meeting You Again'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The first two minutes of "Fancy Meeting You Again" are brilliant and titillating—the latter descriptive being a fancy way of saying "to excite pleasurably." Leueen MacGrath, looking lovelier than ever in a white lace wedding dress, is being married to Glenn Langan, a handsome actor, and the judge performing the ceremony comes to the point of asking Miss MacGrath, "Do you take this man . . . etc." She interrupts him by querying, "How's that again?"

This is a fine beginning for the new play by George S. Kaufman and Miss MacG. which opened last evening at the Royale Theatre. It is sharp, surprising and funny. But hardly anything else in the three acts of the comedy is sharp or surprising, and not very much is funny. So brisk a beginning, giving promise of smart nonsense, is followed by a great deal of dreary and puzzling stuff. Miss MacGrath stops her own nuptials and then, over a few incarnations dating as far back as 5,000 years, pulls the same trick. She is a prehistoric Ado Annie but she cain't say yes.

Fantasy That Misses.

"Fancy Meeting You Again" might have got by with me—though, I doubt it—if it had been smuggled into the Royale disguised as an adaptation of a fantasy by one of those fanciful French playwrights like Anouilh. Then one might read into it some portent or design. But, being done in plain English by plain actors as it is, it is a rather sorry venture.

Miss McGrath is a sculptress in a penthouse overlooking what looks like the Plaza Hotel who stops getting married in mid-ceremony because Langan isn't the man she wants. He never has been—even when he was a cave man in the Stone Age dragging her home on a bearskin rug or a lofty Roman buying her out of a H-house in the days of some Caesar. What she wants is Walter Matthau, who at present is an art critic but who, in his time, also has been a cave man and a Roman.

Her Last Chance.

Up to now, though, she has been very kittenish about committing herself with Mr. Matthau, and finally she gets a warning from a pale actor who looks like Alec Guinness in "The Cocktail Party." This actor (Richard Purdy) says that this is the girl's last chance. She isn't going to have any more incarnations, so she'd better get Matthau this time or skip him altogether.

So she gets him. Also in the cast are Reynolds Evans, Margaret Hamilton, Vera Fuller Mellish and Ruth McDevitt. The set, by Albert Johnson, includes some tall statues which look like primitives and modern art at the same time, and I suspect that Mr. Johnson is more successful as a humorist than the playwrights have been.

New York Post

January 15, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Love Pursuit Through the Ages

George S. Kaufman and Leueen MacGrath have written what might have been an extremely funny one-act comedy about reincarnation, but, unfortunately, they have felt called upon to expand it to the conventional three acts, and the result of the expansion has not been happy. Their play, "Fancy Meeting You Again," which opened at the Royale Theater last night, contains some hilarious scenes, as was to have been expected from Mr. Kaufman, but its digressions are oddly depressing, and I am afraid that they overwhelm the gaiety with dullness.

In their new comedy, the authors are telling about a lady artist who seems to be something of a jilt but actually is one of the most faithful of women. At least, it turns out that, for 5,000 years, she has been pursuing the same man down through the course of history, and that she is never quite able to get him to marry her. Since the lady is played by Miss MacGrath and the pursued male is portrayed by Walter Matthau, and both of them are engaging performers, the scenes between the two have a good head start toward success.

Present and Past

So long as the time is the present, things move along with just enough excellence to make the playgoer hopeful. The lady remembers her past, but the man doesn't recall his, and he is inclined to suspect that she is possibly a little bit crazy. All I can say is that he is lucky not to recollect his adventures through the centuries, because it is when the play gets into them that it becomes so flat and unprofitable. There is, for example, a scene in the Stone Age and another in ancient Rome, and I must add that they are sheer padding.

There is also a subplot, which struck me as possessing a minimum of merit. It has something to do with the heroine's career as a sculptor, and the refusal of a fatuous clubwoman to approve of a statue that is supposed to be purchased by her organization. It is difficult not to feel that this episode has been added because Mr. Kaufman and Miss MacGrath believed that they had to make their play last a given length of time. And, when they are thus expanding their brief anecdote, they are, to say the least, not at their best.

Good Points

No one can write a sharp, enlivening comic line with more expertness than Mr. Kaufman, and "Fancy Meeting You Again" has its share of them. There is an excellent opening scene, and the play closes with a couple of happy humorous inventions. And, as I have said, some of the encounters between heroine and hero show the two dramatists at their best. But the padding is always getting in the way, and it is at these times that the new comedy loses its gaiety and inventiveness and becomes nothing short of tedious.

Miss MacGrath is not only a charming and skillful actress but a deftly humorous one, and her performance is entirely winning. Mr. Matthau, who made an excellent impression as the detective in the brief "Twilight Walk" earlier in the season, shows once more what a talented and likable actor he is. Margaret Hamilton is of help as the heroine's secretary, and Glenn Langan does everything possible with the discouraging role of the man who is always being rejected by the persistent female. Albert Johnson's set is excellent, as is Mr. Kaufman's direction. There just isn't enough fun to fill the evening.

Journal American

January 15, 1952

Much of It Is Good But More of It Isn't

By JOHN McCLAIN

Mediocre is a horrible word but it is the one which comes to hand in describing "Fancy Meeting You Again," the new George Kaufman-Leueen MacGrath comedy which was presented last night at the Royale Theatre by Chandler Cowles and Ben Segal.

There were some moments of the memorable Kaufman wit, and laudable performances by Miss MacGrath, Walter Matthau, Margaret Hamilton, Ruth McDevitt and the others. Kaufman directed the proceedings with pace and precision and Albert Johnson ran up a pleasant and practical set. But for my money the sum total didn't justify the contribution of the individual talents. It just misses.

Kaufman and his bride have chosen reincarnation as the subject for the festivities. Although admittedly a worn and rather ambitious premise for a comedy, it still might have risen to eminence with a stronger and less repetitious plot.

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Mostly Amorous

Miss MacGrath as the heroine believes in reincarnation and recalls all her experiences, mostly amorous, through several years of history, beginning with the Stone Age. She has always been in love with Walter Matthau, first as a cave man, later as a shepherd in the Roman era. She has given herself to him with wild abandon through all these centuries, never holding still for the inconvenience of a marriage ceremony.

Today, in New York, she is a sculptress and he is an art critic who is not entirely captivated by her ability. But she still wants him, desperately, and she is only saved from flinging herself at his feet once more by the intervention of that ubiquitous figure, Death, who has been haunting so many local stages this season.

Death says she will either marry the man or he will call her in and there will be no more of this reincarnation stuff.

There is nothing essentially wrong with this structure, as such, but it seemed to me to become labored (once you get the idea) and not quite hilarious enough to go the stretch.

It is funny to see Miss Hamilton in a fur frock in the Stone Age bit, but it isn't so different or quite so comical when she appears shortly thereafter with a long robe and a lyre in the Roman sequence.

There is a similar sameness about much of the dialogue. You can only laugh so long at the bewilderment of Matthau, who is manfully trying to woo Miss MacGrath the while she is telling him he has been her ardent lover for over 2000 years.

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Cast Is Excellent

Entirely on the credit side, however, are the performances of Margaret Hamilton, as the present-day secretary, the Stone Age neighbor and the Roman niece of a brothel keeper; Matthau, as the perpetual lover, and Ruth McDevitt as a modern matron and, in the flashback, a madam.

Miss MacGrath is a most skillful and decorative performer but it seemed to me she played with a depth and intensity that detracted from some of the most humorous situations.

She was in a cloud all right, but I would have preferred to have her riding a higher one—probably pink. She was too terribly lucid and convincing in her rational moments and not mad enough in the others.

So much of it all is so good that it is regrettable to report it a near miss. I hope I'm wrong.

"Anna Christie"

DAILY NEWS

January 10, 1952

A Fine O'Neill Play, 'Anna Christie,' In a Grand Revival at City Center

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Various old-timers, from Shakespeare to Shaw and Maugham, have already been called upon to help the drama season, and last evening another one, Eugene O'Neill, was summoned to the City Center of Music and Drama. The assistance is considerable, for "Anna Christie" is a big, sinewy drama and it is being given a fine, moving performance by Kevin McCarthy, Art Smith, Celeste Holm and Grace Valentine. They don't seem to be writing plays nowadays the way O'Neill used to write them—hard-packed, hard-driving and having great understanding of and compassion for luckless humanity.

"Anna Christie" has had only one other Broadway production—its first, in 1921, with Pauline Lord in the title role. Thirty-one years is a dangerously long time to leave a play lying in storage, for unless it was made of superior material it may fall apart when it is held up to the lights of a stage for a new, close look. This drama passes the test, for when it was made it was made right.

Should Run Longer..

But "Anna Christie" is no easy thing to do; it was made right but it also must be played right, and the New York City Theatre Company is to be congratulated upon last evening's production. "Anna" being a far more effective use of good talent than was the first of the City Center's series of three revivals, "The Wild Duck," a way or a place should be found to permit an engagement longer than the two weeks now scheduled for it.

Playgoers with long memories, readers of O'Neill and followers of the Garbo movies will know that "Anna Christie" is O'Neill's story of Chris Christopherson, a tough little old barge captain who has retired from sailing because he hates "dat ol' davil sea"; of Anna Christie, his daughter, a prostitute who seeks out her father when she is weary and ill, and of Mat Burke, a lusty brawling playboy of the ocean world who comes up out of a shipwreck to the barge and falls in love with Anna.

Three Very Real Persons.

What makes O'Neill a notable dramatist is not so much the moves and counter-moves of his plots, for some of these plots have been rather rickety; his artistry lies in the fact that, once he has created characters, he allows these characters their own wills and souls. "Anna" is well made structurally, but its profound interest comes from its people. O'Neill knew the bitterness of old Chris, a seafaring man who never knew home or daughter; he knew the other kind of bitterness possessed by Anna—a hopelessness and a hatred of men; and he knew the great anger and agony of the young Irishman who learns that the woman to whom he has given his simple heart is a woman of the streets. O'Neill knew all this, and he also knew these people—that within them was a human yearning for decency and love.

I suppose interest will center in Miss Holm's portrayal of Anna. I did not see Miss Lord in the play, but did witness a creditable performance by Ingrid Bergman on a California stage. I think Miss Holm is excellent; she plays quietly, almost casually, but she can summon dramatic effects where they are needed and her sincerity is absolutely convincing. It is an individual and intelligent approach to the role.

"ANNA CHRISTIE"

Revival of the play by Eugene O'Neill; staged by Michael Gordon; settings and costumes by Emeline Roche; presented by the New York City Theatre Company at New York City Center, January 9, 1952. The cast:

Man-at-the-Bar.....Lou Gilbert
Johnny-the-Priest..Frank Rowan
1st Longshoreman...Ely Segall
2nd Longshoreman..Matt Resnick
Postman.....Arthur O'Connell
Larry.....Jerry Paris
Chris Christopher....Art Smith
Marthy Owen...Grace Valentine
Anna Christopherson.....
Celeste Holm
Mat Burke.....Kevin McCarthy
Johnson.....Robert Anderson

McCarthy Is Splendid.

McCarthy is quixotic and pathetic by turn as the young sailor, and his humor is sure. It is a splendid performance, and so is that of Art Smith as old Chris. These are far better than quick and easy characterizations. Miss Valentine is grand in her one long scene in the first act in the role of Chris's blowsy "woman" who summons the gallantry to move out of the barge to save face and make room for father and daughter.

The performance is well planned as well as admirably realized under the direction of Michael Gordon, and Emeline Roche's sets are just the right background. Our stage is the poorer because O'Neill is not writing now—but the richer because when he did write, he wrote.

Journal American

January 10, 1952

Powerful Production: Fine Cast, Direction

By JOHN McCLAIN

In a season stiff with revivals, many of which failed to rally to artificial respiration, it is pleasant to report that the New York City Theatre Co. last night brought the full bloom of life to one which has been quiescent these past 30 years.

I refer to Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie," with Celeste Holm, Art Smith, Grace Valentine and Kevin McCarthy in the important roles.

This is a powerfully rewarding production of one of O'Neill's highly popular though less ambitious plays and it restores faith in the largely unfulfilled efforts of the City Center people.

It should certainly prove popular enough to be extended beyond the limits of its advertised run—hopefully in less spacious and more attractive premises than the City Center Theatre.

At the moment everybody is strangely preoccupied with the Sea. Three best sellers are: "The Cruel Sea," "The Caine Mutiny" and "The Sea Around Us," and today's headlines concern the fate of a brave skipper trying to get his disabled ship to port. In each of these adventures, factual or not, the villain is the sea. And so it is with "Anna Christie."

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Comes to See Dad

An elderly Swedish sailor, now reduced to commanding a barge in the east U.S. coastal run, gets word that a daughter he hasn't seen for 15 years is about to turn up in New York as, she hopes, his guest. The little flower arrives and he persuades her to take the next passage aboard his barge.

In the harbor at Provincetown there is a fog, out of which emerge some survivors from a shipwreck, among them a very loud and strenuous Irishman who falls instantly in love with the girl.

A situation develops immediately between her squarehead father, who will not allow her to squander her life on anybody connected with "ole debbil sea" and the broth of a boy, who wishes immediately to take her away, faith and bejabbers.

The climax arrives when the little flower, driven to the last extremity in the center of this vortex, announces that she has been a practicing prostitute for several seasons. This drives both the boy and the father off the barge, and lowers the curtain on the second act.

The third act is short and incisive—the fallen frail finding strength and redemption in the forgiving male.

The Sea takes a bad beating all through the evening. The Sea is blamed for depriving the girl of a home and thus projecting her into an elderly though unsavory profession; it is blamed for the plight of both the father and the violent Irishman. And, in light of recent events, the indictment may stand up.

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Holm Is Excellent

Miss Holm, not heretofore regarded as a serious emotional actress, gave what I consider a performance of great depth and conviction as Anna Christie. I will even stake her against Garbo, who did the job for the flicks, and Ingrid Bergman, who undertook the role in a rather ill-starred venture in Santa Barbara, Calif., in the late thirties. I don't know about Pauline Lord, who originated the part.

I have equal plaudits for A. Smith, as her father, and Kevin McCarthy, as the irascible Irishman. Grace Valentine, who contributed a solid section of the first act as the father's amiable mistress, was both endearing and awe-inspiring. She managed to down most of three large steins of beer in full view of the audience.

I believe sincere credit must be given Michael Gordon, the director, who supervised the charade with unusual fluidity and strength.

This happens to be one of the most tangible of O'Neill's dramas—a basic situation wonderfully well propounded. I liked it, and I'm sure you'll agree.

The New York Times

January 10, 1952

Eugene O'Neill's 'Anna Christie' Performed at the City Center With Celeste Holm

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although "Anna Christie" is not the best of Eugene O'Neill's plays, it is better than most of the plays that turn up on Broadway, and it outranks any of the new plays of this season. Fortunately, it is also just right for a City Center season. And the performance that opened at the Center last evening is a first-rate piece of work with Celeste Holm, Art Smith and Kevin McCarthy in fine fettle in the leading parts.

When Mr. O'Neill wrote "Anna Christie" in 1920 he was still under the pungent spell of the S. S. Glencairn mariners, and his sense of tragedy was not thoroughly formed. There is something about the conclusion of "Anna Christie" that is not so thoroughly resolved as "Desire Under the Elms."

* * *

But his nearness to the sea plays in 1920 made it possible for him to create tumultuous, elemental characters whose problems are unsophisticated and whose suffering is fierce. The amiable, stupid barge-captain, the prostitute and the braggart stoker might be hackneyed characters in other hands, and the fog-shrouded coal barge might be a casually romantic vessel.

But Mr. O'Neill's characters, who made such an impression on the theatre thirty-one years ago, are as honest as they are dramatic. Ignorant and helpless, they are cursed with wrong-headed obsessions, and they batter their heads wildly against barriers they set up for themselves.

* * *

The ending of "Anna Christie" is a happy one, at least from the technical point of view. But you know that for the rest of their lives Chris Christopherson, the ancient child of the sea; Anna, his daughter, and Mat, the stoker, will be stumbling through one stupid crisis after another, full of pain and protest, and always out of control. Every scene and line in "Anna Christie" is packed with vitality, and saturated in the sea.

Under Michael Gordon's alert and perceptive direction, the performance is as vital as the characters. Miss Holm, always an able and intelligent actress, makes something candid and coherent out of the part of Anna. Pauline Lord brought something uniquely uncertain and compassionate to the original performance, and she gave the whole of "Anna Christie" a depth that is lacking now. But Miss Lord's style was wholly personal. Miss Holm's attitude is more direct and more contemporary, but it makes for the tension in the play.

Mr. McCarthy's wild, lunging, rattle-headed stoker has enormous range and force and puts a lot of fire into the performance. As the aging barge-skipper, Art Smith has created a fascinating and logical character who is all humanity in his sentimentality, his confusion and his weaknesses. As the skipper's current woman, Grace Valentine gives a comic performance that translates a minor character into something both valid and delightful.

As further evidence of the City Center's growing mastery of its job, pay a little attention to Emeline Roche's terse but inviting settings that translate frowzy material into dramatic designs. "Anna Christie" is part of the American theatre's heritage. It is good to have it recognized now in an invigorating performance.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

January 10, 1952

'Anna Christie'

By WALTER F. KERR

CITY CENTER has been at some pains to give Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie" the careful production it deserves. From designer Emeline Roche it has got three sets—a waterfront saloon, the stern and the cabin of a coal barge—which are as atmospherically helpful to the play as they are successfull adapted to the cavernous proportions of City Center's stage. And director Michael Gordon has obviously labored long and hard to pull the company into some kind of cohesive mood. He has even managed to light them well—a rare achievement at this playhouse.

As a result, the current revival of O'Neill's thirty-year-old play begins quite promisingly. Art Smith has been remarkably successful in feeling out the lighter moods of old Chris Christopherson, the sea-hating barge captain. As he reels into Johnny-the-Priest's saloon in company with his old harradan Marthy, as he learns with pleasure that the daughter he hasn't seen in fifteen years is coming to stay with him, and as he tries to rid himself of his blowsy, beer-swilling companion, he is a completely realized figure. Grace Valentine, too, brings belligerent and good-natured life to her Marthy. Even when Celeste Holm, as Anna, sidles in at the doorway, gaudy and defeated, the show is still in firm control of itself. Miss Holm's experience has been mostly in comedy, a training which stands her in good stead while she is giving a sly lift to O'Neill's faintly dated slang.

* * *

It is thereafter that the City Center acting company get themselves into trouble. O'Neill carries his small-time prostitute to some pretty demanding heights: to the cleansing experience of a pseudo-mystical contact with the sea; to an idealistically romantic love affair which can only explode in her face; and to a final fierce assertion of her rights as a human being. Miss Holm does not really have the emotional weight to go along. She is content to underplay, even when the going is roughest. She consistently works the pathos of the part, rather than its integrity. She begs when she might well command. As a result, her successes are intermittent and fragmentary; she reads a simple confession of love very nicely, but she cannot drive the part home with the tremendous rising intensity it demands.

Kevin McCarty, as the burly, cantankerous Irishman she falls in love with, plays with much greater force. But he has not quite got at the meat of the play, either. There is a natural imagery in the picturesque speech of O'Neill's earthy stoker, but Mr. McCarty frequently reads it as straight lyricism, reaching for poetry when he might have settled for the honest passion of realistically-drawn character.

Because neither of the play's leading performers tangle forthrightly with the open violence of O'Neill's big scenes—Miss Holm shies away from them, Mr. McCarty sings past them—"Anna Christie" never achieves any cumulative impact. As a further result, the comedy which has always been part of the play tends to push itself to the fore, and the subtle and lifelike balances of O'Neill's original piece suffer serious distortion. Humor takes over and the private agonies that make up the real heart of "Anna Christie" disappear.

The old play still looks seaworthy, but last evening it was shipping light.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 10, 1952

'Anna Christie' Back —Why Not Sooner?

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The City Center's revival of Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie" makes it astonishing that the play has not been done oftener in the 30 years since it was first produced.

The play has great stature and power, which comes most directly from its simplicity. It is almost equally the story of Anna, her father, and her one great love. O'Neill has written his story, and these characters, in such a way that the patterns are indelible, but the details can be liberally worked out by the performer.

Anna comes to her father, whom she has not seen since she was a child, to recuperate from an illness. She conceals from him the degraded life into which his indifference has forced her.

Anna Tells the Truth.

The old man is outraged when she falls in love with a sailor. When the two fighting men begin treating her like a piece of furniture, Anna is driven to telling them the truth. Each of them is devastated. In the end both men must face the fact that he is no better than she is, and that he has done nothing to help her.

O'Neill's theme is crystal clear as he shows you these people applying extraordinary standards to others, but never to themselves, then putting the blame on anything, including the sea, when their problems seem insoluble.

The most striking performance in the present production of the play is Kevin McCarthy's as the shipwrecked sailor Anna loves. This is a generous, full, rich job of acting, as the lusty Irishman.

McCarthy plays with fine appreciation of the littleness of the man's flexibility, and the bigness of his nature. He gives the play wildness and strength, and hurls its emotions around as if a hurri-

cane had hit him.

Art Smith plays Anna's father on a much smaller but just as effective scale. He is baffled and cringing, always ready to run away once more. The Swedish accent sounded completely natural. The animal spirits and dejection of this man are touching, and seem always to spring from a genuine inner idea.

As Marthy, the beer soaked companion of the father, Grace Valentine makes a real jewel of a little role. In a few moments, she portrays a series of contrasting emotions with infinite clarity and the most convincing motives.

In the Wrong Harbor?

Celeste Holm as Anna seemed to me to have swum right into the wrong harbor. A highly capable comedienne, she gets the few laughs in the part easily. Otherwise she plays in a manner that suggests she is thinking a great deal and feeling nothing.

She dresses like a studious sophomore at Wellesley, and last night was barely audible. I wish she would muss up her hair, dull the gleam of her teeth, get a run in her stocking, and generally look and act more like a girl who has come from a palace of joy via a jail hospital.

It is remarkable that her pallid attack on the bitter resentments of this role make so little difference to the play. The great disservice is to McCarthy, whose love for her becomes fair evidence that he must be something of a jerk.

Daily Mirror

January 10, 1952

'Anna Christie' Welcome Revival at City Center

By ROBERT COLEMAN

If ever a play were written for an actress, "Anna Christie" was for the late Pauline Lord. Perhaps it's nostalgia, but we remember Miss Lord as perfect in this Eugene O'Neill saga of the sea. No one since, has approached her in the role, which she made notably her own.

Miss Lord brought a wispy, piping, pathetic voice to Anna. She brought frail, fluttery hands that spoke volumes. And she brought poignance and depth of feeling. You really believed she had been done wrong by, by the sea and the men in her life. You felt genuinely sorry for her.

Which is a preface to saying that the New York City Theatre Company revived "Anna Christie" at the City Center last evening, with Celeste Holm in the title role, Art Smith as Chris, Kevin McCarthy as Mat and Grace Valentine as Marthy. It's a welcome revival, too, for we've been wanting to see the O'Neill classic again for quite a spell.

It took courage for Miss Holm to follow in the footsteps of Miss Lord. In fact, it would take courage for any actress to essay the part. On its own terms, Miss Holms interpretation is a valid one. She has a physical beauty and a robustness that Miss Lord lacked. And there's the rub.

You honestly believed that fate, that circumstances, had made Miss Lord a bad girl. You believed that she was the type who could be pushed around by unscrupulous and thoughtless men. But you keep wondering when Miss Holm is going to bat the blazes out of her tormentors. And she appears to be capable of it, too.

Young McCarthy is a brawny, roistering bucko of a stoker. He's the sort to catch the feminine eye, and tax the feminine patience. Art Smith is a commendable Chris, well-meaning and weak. And Grace Valentine is quite wonderful as the bibulous, hard-bitten Marthy. She downed schooners of beer till you thought she would burst. The first-nighters broke into spontaneous applause at her ability to absorb the suds.

"Anna Christie" is the kind of play that cries for an intimate playhouse, and the City Center is really huge. Players cannot indulge in subtle acting in its expansive reaches. Their deliveries must be on the stentorian side, and their movements broad.

Director Michael Gordon has done remarkably well by the staging, in view of these handicaps, though it appeared to us that he took an act and a half to hit a truly effective pace.

The current "Anna Christie" is a happier one than most.

Miss Holm is one of a handful of young actresses with a personal draw. She has that indefinable something that makes playgoers want to see her again and again. We salute her and her associates for lending their services to this production at token salaries, for the New York City Theatre Company is a civic enterprise working on a limited budget.

"Anna Christie" is one of O'Neill's most interesting and absorbing plays. We think you should embrace the opportunity to catch it at bargain prices.

New York Post

January 10, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Revival of O'Neill's 'Anna Christie'

Although it is not one of his most distinguished or satisfactory plays, Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie" remains a drama of considerable emotional power. It has admirably forceful scenes, a fine first act, some arresting characterizations, and a memorable atmosphere of brooding intensity.

Despite its weaknesses, particularly in the final act, it should be clear to anyone that it is the work of a dramatist of stature, and it is decidedly worth the attention of those who are seriously interested in the American theater.

As done at the City Center last night, a good deal of the sheer theatrical effectiveness of the famous drama of sex and the sea is made evident, even though I have certain important reservations to make about the performances and the production. Before going into them, however, it is only fair to say that the greatest of our playwrights is not without responsibility for the frailties that emerge in this new presentation. If the last act seems to lapse at times almost into farce, it is not only because the playing isn't quite right but also because the author didn't quite master all of his material.

Celeste Holm

The current "Anna Christie" is almost certain to attract audiences, both because of the inherent emotional forcefulness of the drama and through the presence in the title role of Celeste Holm, an actress who is now at the peak of her popularity. Miss Holm is a talented player who can tear an emotion to tatters with the best of them, and she has her excellent moments as the prostitute who is cleansed by the half-baleful, half-purifying influence of the sea. I cannot help thinking, though, that she is just a little too slick and smooth to be altogether moving as O'Neill's bedraggled heroine.

I wasn't quite satisfied with Kevin McCarthy's portrayal of the Irish seaman, who loves Anna, either. This part of the romantic, humorless, bull-headed, narrow-minded stoker is not an easy one to manage, because the earnest intensity of the young Celt is at times only too close to burlesque. A sufficiently skillful performance can keep the role from slipping into farce, even in the last act, but Mr. McCarthy, who handles the scenes of the Irishman's courtship well enough, gets rather lost in these later episodes.

The First Act

The best part of "Anna Christie" is the first act, and it is here that the revival is likewise at its best. The scene in Johnny-the-Priest's saloon, where Anna meets her father, the old captain who hates the sea, is O'Neill in one of his happiest veins, and it is here that Art Smith, who is intermittently effective as old Chris, plays with most ability. It is this act which also has the drama's most engaging character, Chris' blowzy sweetheart, Marthy, and the part is admirably played by Grace Valentine.

Although Miss Holm and Mr. McCarthy leave a lot of their difficult characterizations unfulfilled, they have enough theatrical sense to achieve a certain emotional power in the climactic scenes, and "Anna Christie," it must be admitted, is more successful as a series of big scenes than it is as an entirely integrated play. If you happen to be a veteran theatergoer who saw the late Pauline Lord's superb characterization of Anna, you may be as sullen an observer of this revival as I seem to be. If you are seeing the drama for the first time, you will at least find a suggestion of the power that made "Anna Christie" so important in American theatrical history.

"Pal Joey"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 4, 1942

"PAL JOEY"

By WALTER F. KERR

"PAL JOEY," which Jule Styne and Leonard Key brought back to Broadway Thursday night after twelve years, has one of the shrewdest, toughest, and in a way the most literate books ever written for musical comedy. It has Richard Rodgers' enchanting score, a perfect blending of witty musical inflection and honest melody. It has Lorenz Hart's still gay, still effortlessly ingenious lyrics. It has sets by Oliver Smith that are just right for it, and a choreographic drive provided by Robert Alton that sends it spinning across the stage. It has, in fact, just about everything except a Pal Joey.

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Harold Lang, who has inherited the role of John O'Hara's brash, slick, two-timing heel, is an accomplished dancer and, like most of our dancers nowadays, he has learned to sing. But he is a lightweight in heavyweight company, a lamb in wolf's clothing. He still looks as though he would be just a shade under-age for the part of Willie Baxter in "Seventeen." Nor is his physical slightness and eternally juvenile appearance all that is wrong here. His heart is pure, too, though he has learned how to throw a line out of the side of his mouth, and how to ape the shellacked toughness of O'Hara's night-club crowd, he must force the mannerisms all the way, and I, at least, didn't believe a dirty word of it. Mr. Lang can be engaging, and he works like a demon; but he cannot escape looking like a puss in boots much too big for him.

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With this one big qualification out of the way, it is possible to go on and recapitulate the very real pleasures of the evening. Nothing of what John O'Hara, or Richard Rodgers ,or Lorentz Hart wrote in 1940 has dated the least bit. The book, probably the first of our time to break with the innocent sentimentalities of conventional musical comedy, still has a raffish, honest, eye-opening air about it. As it follows its cocky grifter through an assortment of calculated love affairs, it remains funny, hard-bitten and knowing down the line.

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A good many talented people are playing it lustily. Vivienne Segal is back at her old stand as Vera, the worldly-wise matron who stakes Joey to his dream night-club in Chicago and then jauntily ditches him before he can get around to ditching her. Miss Segal is a model of composure and charm, and because she catches exactly the confident worldliness the authors had in mind, she makes it doubly tough for the youthful and effortful Mr. Lang. Her delivery of "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" is little short of magnificent, and I especially like her handling of a duet with the ingenue called "Take Him," a wry little gem of a number in which both women give Joey the heave-ho.

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Helen Gallagher blows the roof off with a satiric first-act dance, "That Terrific Rainbow," and between times is the best looking thing on stage. Elaine Stritch winds up for a knockout with her "Zip" number in the second act, and manages her only dialogue scene in a fine jaundiced manner. "I Could Write a Book" is still there, too, and Robert Alton has made the by now overly familiar parody on night-club flower songs seem fresh and very funny.

In short, just about everyhing is in first-rate shape at the Broadhurst except the hard, dry core of character and style that O'Hara wrote into his central figure. The defection does reduce "Pal Joey" to a far more conventional musical than it once was. Taken conventionally, it has a lot of bright moments.

"PAL JOEY"

Revival of the musical play with music by Richard Rodgers; lyrics by Lorenz Hart; book by John O'Hara; dances staged by Robert Alton; book staged by David Alexander; settings by Oliver Smith; costumes by Miles White; presented by Jule Styne and Leonard Key in association with Anthony B. Farrell at the Broadhurst Theatre, January 3, 1952. The cast:

Mike.....Jack Waldron
Joey.....Harold Lang
Kid.....Helen Wood
Gladys.....Helen Gallagher
Agnes.....Janyce Ann Wagner
Mickey.....Phyllis Dorne
Diane.....Frances Krell
Dottie.....Lynn Joelson
Sandra.....Eleanor Boleyn
Adele.....Rita Tanno
Francine.....Gloria O'Malley
Linda.....Pat Northrop
Vera.....Vivienne Segal
Valerie.....Barbara Nichols
Waiter.....George Martin
Amarilla.....Thelma Tadlock
Ernest.....Gordon Peters
Victor.....Robert Fortier
Delivery Boy.....Barry Ryan
Stage Manager...Clarke Gordon
Louis.....Lewis Bolyard
Melba.....Elaine Stritch
Ludlow Lowell...Lionel Stander
O'Brien.....T. J. Halligan

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

January 4, 1942

'Joey' Just What Stem Needed

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

One of the biggest, most enthusiastic premiere audiences in years welcomed "Pal Joey" back to Broadway last night, on a tidal wave of cheers.

The musical is as brisk, bright, cutting, funny and crisp as it was Christmas night of 1940 when it opened for the first time. All the people who have been raving about it ever since will now have only to compete with a new crowd of fans.

This is sure what Broadway has been needing.

Every Inch a Star.

It is the sort of evening where you hesitate to single individuals out for praise, because everyone involved has done so admirably.

If anybody is on a pinnacle it is Vivienne Segal, sleek and alluring again as Vera, who pays for her fling with Joey, sets him up in a night club of his own and neatly walks out on him when she finds what a rotter he actually is.

Miss Segal with her infinite economy of style, lush magnetism and immaculate enunciation, is every inch a star. The audience bellowed just to see her, when she first walked down the steps into the night club. She got a howl with a two-word line, then with a monosyllable and finally slayed them with a nicely turned glance.

Dancing Is Excellent.

The dances with which Robert Alton has filled the show are Heaven sent, satirical but pretty, usually flavored with a suggestion of strip tease nonsense. They perfectly compliment the salty humor of John O'Hara's book, and the late Lorenz Hart's brilliant lyrics.

You find that you remember a lot of the other Rodgers tunes, beside the familiar "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" and "I Could Write a Book."

Like "Happy Hunting Horn" and "Do It the Hard Way," for instance, two of the frequent jaunty numbers Harold Lang sings as Joey. He is rarely off the stage, and never still, with high notes or his heels flying through the air. It is a happy, stylized silhouette of a greedy little egotist he creates, well worthy of this classic of show business.

Spotlights Helen Wood.

Then there is "Zip" which Elaine Stritch socked across the lights to bravos that demanded an encore. And the wonderfully idiotic "Terrific Rainbow," which Helen Gallagher gives the audience so much fun with. Miss Gallagher is nearly as busy as Lang, as a goony entertainer, and performs with great constancy and wit.

"Pal Joey" quite properly spotlights one of the finest young dancers in the theater in Helen Wood, who can fool gravity airily, without trying to prove anything except how prettily she can move.

Lionel Stander has a very solid scene as he outlines some plans for blackmail. And an unseen contributor, Miles White, gets frequent laughs with his costumes. Pat Northrup is the prettiest of some very attractive young ladies, as the good girl who escapes Joey despite herself. Max Meth in the pit keeps a firm, lively hand on the whole peppery affair.

This was a night to howl about.

The New York Times

January 4, 1942

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

As an augury of a Happy New Year, the town has inherited a brilliant production of "Pal Joey," which opened at the Broadhurst last evening. This is the Rodgers and Hart musical play for which John O'Hara wrote the book in 1940, and, strictly speaking, the new production is a revival.

But there is no sign of age in the brisk performance that Robert Alton has expertly staged; and the acting is sharp and original. Vivienne Segal is on hand again to sing "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," which is one of the most eloquent songs Richard Rodgers has written. Again Miss Segal presides over the sordid affairs of an astringent tale with humor, reserve and charm.

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It would be hard to improve upon Harold Lang's performance as the heel of Chicago night life. He acts with the cheap guile that Mr. O'Hara caught in his pitiless portrait of one of the most revolting characters in current letters—plausible, clever, superficially ingratiating, but consistently odious when the balance is struck. Mr. Lang is pleasant as a singer. As a dancer he is superb; he is light, swift, gay and inventive. If there was ever any doubt about the genuineness of his talent, Mr. Lang has removed it with this searching and resourceful performance.

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The acting is delightful throughout the evening. Helen Gallagher's sleek night club dancer, Elaine Stritch's caricature of a tough columnist, Lionel Stander's unctuously ferocious gangster — are adroit characterizations and they are also hilarious. And the brassy choruses Mr. Alton has directed in a sardonic style are thoroughly enjoyable.

In 1940 "Pal Joey" was regarded by its satellites as the musical that broke the old formula and brought the musical stage to maturity. There was a minority, including this column, that was not enchanted. But no one is likely now to be impervious to the tight organization of the production, the terseness of the writing, the liveliness and versatility of the score and the easy perfection of the lyrics.

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Since the days of "Oklahoma" the musical stage has grown in awareness and artistry. On Forty-fourth Street, where "Pal Joey" is now installed, Mr. Rodgers is represented by the scores of "South Pacific" and "The King and I," which are musically more ambitious. But it is true that "Pal Joey" was a pioneer in the moving back of musical frontiers, for it tells an integrated story with a knowing point of view.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals are moving toward folk operas. "Pal Joey" does not stray outside the bailiwick of commercial musical comedy, and the dance routines, satiric in accent, are pretty much in the old patterns. But there is something refreshing about the return of musical comedy in an unhackneyed rendering, with Oliver Smith's pungent settings and Miles White's amusing costumes.

Brimming over with good music and fast on its toes, "Pal Joey," renews confidence in the professionalism of the theatre. Mr. O'Hara's night-club tout has begun Broadway's new year auspiciously.

Daily Mirror

January 4, 1942

'Pal Joey' Better Than Ever in Comeback

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Jule Styne, Leonard Key and Anthony B. Farrell did New York playgoers a favor by reviving "Pal Joey" at the Broadhurst Theatre last evening. Like good wine, and unlike most musicals, this wonderful song-and-dancer by Richard Rodgers, the late Lorenz Hart and John O'Hara has grown better with age.

To tell the truth, we didn't realize what a masterpiece "Pal Joey" really is until we caught it last night. The gorgeous music by Rodgers, the great lyrics by Hart and the sophisticated book by O'Hara are a perfect entertainment combination. Robert Alton, returned from Hollywood, has created fast, furious and funny ensembles, which skillfully further the action and serve as satiric comment on a dizzy era in American life.

Vivienne Segal again is magnificent as the Chicago socialite with a roving eye and a big bankroll, who angels an egotistical young nightclub heel and drops him like a hot potato when he fails to amuse her any longer. Harold Lang, who has developed into a fine, versatile performer since his start with Ballet Theatre is rightly engaging and exasperating as the conceited ham.

Helen Gallagher is delightful as a brassy ginmill chantootsie, and Pat Northrop is most attractive as the nice girl who falls for a bad guy. Elaine Stritch, as a hard-boiled columnist, stepped forth in a single number and stopped the show with an hilarious impersonation of a would-be intellectual stripteaser. Lionel Stander, easy-on-the-eyes Helen Wood, Jack Waldron and Lewis Bolyard are other assets.

If space permitted, we'd like to salute every member of the large cast. Choristers and principals perform with ingratiating zest. Their high spirits also extend into musical director Max Meth's orchestra pit. The drummer, a percussion virtuoso, appeared to enjoy the riotous onstage shenanigans as much as we did.

Oliver Smith's settings, Miles White's costumes, David Alexander's direction and Don Walker's arrangements also merit cheers.

New York is a breezier and brighter town now that "Pal Joey" has checked in. Take our advice and rush to the Broadhurst boxoffice immediately, unless you want to wait months to see it. The champ is back in superlative form.

DAILY NEWS

January 4, 1942

'Pal Joey' Returns, Still a Smart, Swift and Well-Cast Music Show

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I had the advantage of most of those who attended the revival at the Broadhurst Theatre last evening, for it was my first glimpse of "Pal Joey," by Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart and John O'Hara. Thus I don't have to bother or bewilder myself with comparisons, and can get right down to the present case by saying that "Pal Joey" is fast, funny, tough and tuneful, with a grand cast of entertainers.

Among these entertainers I would rate high a batch of chorus girls pretty enough to revive the Stage Door John — but a John, I fear, would fail to score, for those cheerful youngsters must have been ready to drop last night after going through Robert Alton's furious and flashy dance numbers. There hasn't been a dancing chorus like this one around town in a long time — or dances like Alton's, either. Those high-stepping routines give today's artful ballet stuff a swift kick in the eye.

Miss Segal Commands.

Chief among the principals is Vivienne Segal, in absolute command of the role of a not-so-young matron who kidnaps a young night club punk named Joey. The audience kept her singing "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" for a long time last night—too long, maybe. Next I'd rate Helen Gallagher, a natural-born imp who can dance anything, be very funny and sing.

In the role of the heel, Joey, Harold Lang is doing even better than he did in "Kiss Me, Kate." He is a fine dancer, full of surprising tricks; he sings well enough to get by, and his impersonation of O'Hara's lousy louse is very good. In a big cast there is plenty of help from such as Lionel Stander, Pat Northrop, Elaine Stritch, Helen Wood and Jack Waldron. Oliver Smith's sets and Miles White's costumes are dandy.

The Song Is New.

I can't pretend I haven't heard all those Rodgers-Hart songs, though, for they have been in the national consciousness for some years. But I do report that they sound new, crisp and not too clean as they are sung on the stage and played in Max Meth's pit at the Broadhurst.

"Pal Joey" was slipped over on me while I was spending a couple of happy years in Hollywood, but I've been reading the historians and they say this was the show that broke away from musical comedy tradition and set a new style in realism. It still is a pretty good style.

Journal-American

January 4, 1942

Fast, Funny, Feasible And Still a Great Hit

By JOHN McCLAIN

"Pal Joey," the most uncompromising heel in the annals of musical comedy, came crashing back to town last night and there seems little doubt that he can pursue his devious course across the stage of the Broadhurst Theatre as long as the roof stays on the joint. That may not be so long, however, because they almost blew it off at last night's opening.

In my compendium the enthusiasm was entirely justified. Judged on its own merits, with no backward glance at the original show or the memorable music, I found it fast, funny and feasible. I call it a hit—a homer inside the park.

The revival is pretty well dominated by Vivienne Segal in the same role she originated 11 years ago; by Harold Lang as Joey, the part which rocketed Gene Kelly to fame; by strenuous and highly rewarding performances from Helen Gallagher and Lionel Stander and, perhaps most of all, by the incomparable talent of Robert Alton, who originated the dances and paced the whole production to the tempo of a Texas twister.

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Hits Pay Dirt

Although confronted by the fact that many of the scenes take place in a night club not unlike the premises in "Guys and Dolls," he succeeded in making the new choreography equally furious and comical. His new ballet, "Joey's Dream," will match anything in town.

"Pal Joey," you may recall, is based on John O'Hara's New Yorker magazine hero, an unrelenting blackguard who sings and dances his way through dreary little nightclubs, always winding up without work through complications arising from his frequent and temporary involvement with the dolls.

Finally in Chicago, he hits pay dirt in the arms of Miss Segal, the wealthy though worn wife of a bakery millionaire. From this alliance comes backing for his wish-fulfilment—his own night club. But of course there is a blackmailer lurking in the wings and he returns penniless to the streets, a good, solid rat to the end.

The book, the work of the same O'Hara, seems to have withstood the ravages of time almost as well as Miss Segal, who looks to me exactly as she did in the original show.

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Tribute to Hart

The great score, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," "I Could Write a Book," and all the feature numbers like "Zip" (wonderfully well done this time by Elaine Stritch) are a tribute to the immortality of the late Lorenz Hart and the very current magic of Richard Rodgers.

David Alexander has kept the action of the book apace with the dance numbers and Oliver Smith's settings are colorful, imaginative and extremely workable.

Harold Lang works like a maniac all evening, returning from a dance sometimes before he could mop his brow or catch his breath. He is a most engaging performer and a dancer of rare ability, but it is impossible not to compare him, somewhat to his disadvantage, to the great Kelly. Kelly was somehow a much more attractive heel and a more skillful dancer, or my memory fails me.

"Pal Joey" was one of the first musicals to employ some semblance of believable plot and it was certainly the first to have as its hero an unmitigated louse. Even so, it ran for 374 performances—and I shouldn't be surprised to see the present proceedings do just as well.

New York Post

January 4, 1942

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Happy Brilliance of 'Pal Joey'

As one of the original enthusiasts for "Pal Joey," I am happy to report that the famous musical comedy by John O'Hara, Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers is every bit as brilliant, fresh and delightful as it seemed when it set new standards for its field over ten years ago. As presented last night at the Broadhurst Theater in a handsome, vigorous and dynamic production, this remarkably believable and fascinating tale of the rise and fall of a night-club insect is so vital and alive that it is impossible to think of it as a revival. Put it down, instead, as the best and most exciting new musical play of the season, and the town's latest hit.

I hate to inflict on it so seemingly serious-minded a label, but "Pal Joey" is very definitely an authentic work of art. But it is also great fun, in its strangely savage and sardonic fashion. John O'Hara's book is biting, real and filled with its author's celebrated gift for recognizable talk and characters. Mr. Rodgers' score is gayly delightful, and the late Lorenz Hart's lyrics are so sly, witty, inventive and sparkling that they are a constant joy. The cast, too, is very close to perfection, and the staging, the dance numbers, the sets and the costumes achieve a high quality of imaginative brilliance.

Humorous Candor

When "Pal Joey" was first produced on Christmas night, 1940, it seemed virtually revolutionary in its toughness and scorn for musical-comedy sentimentality. To tell you the truth, it shocked people, because it took as its central figures a kept man and the rich woman who kept him, and, while it certainly pilloried its dubious hero as an insect, it didn't molest him with moral disapproval. It assuredly hasn't gained any sentimental overtones in the interval, and it is still the most hard-boiled musical play since "The Beggar's Opera," but it is done with too much freshly humorous candor to be anything but an intelligent delight.

There can certainly be no doubt that Joey is very completely what used to be described as a cad and a bounder. But he is also a remarkably entertaining fellow, and, with all his dubiousness, he is somehow such an innocent, gullible idiot that he becomes curiously likeable. As a moralist, I'm glad that he doesn't come to any good end, but I must confess to a certain fondness for him. This is in considerable part because Harold Lang plays him so skillfully. In the difficult position of taking on the role in which Gene Kelly became famous, Mr. Lang registers a very complete personal triumph as singer, actor and dancer.

The Songs

There isn't a song in "Pal Joey" that isn't wonderful. The most famous, of course, is the memorable "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," but I have particular fondness for a charming duet called "Take Him; He's Your's," as well as vast enthusiasm for such numbers as "Our Little Den of Iniquity," "I Could Write a Book," "Zip," "Plant You Now" and "The Flower Garden of My Heart." And I hate to leave out any of them. Robert Alton, who staged the dances in the first production, repeats his remarkable job here, and the musical numbers are masterpieces of satirical wit. There is a devastating humor about all of "Pal Joey."

Vivienne Segal, who scored a great hit in the original production, brings a wit, a warm comic sense and a superb ability to put over an ironic song to her playing of the rich woman that make her work irresistible. The enchanting Helen Gallagher, who has just been waiting for the right opportunity, becomes a top-rank musical-comedy performer of real distinction by her portrayal of an attractive but questionable night-club girl, and Pat Northrop plays the decent ingenue with rare freshness and honesty. Elaine Stritch handles the show-stopping "Zip" number admirably, Lionel Stander is believeable as a blackmailing agent, and Helen Wood dances with great charm and humor. "Pal Joey" is a genuine treat.